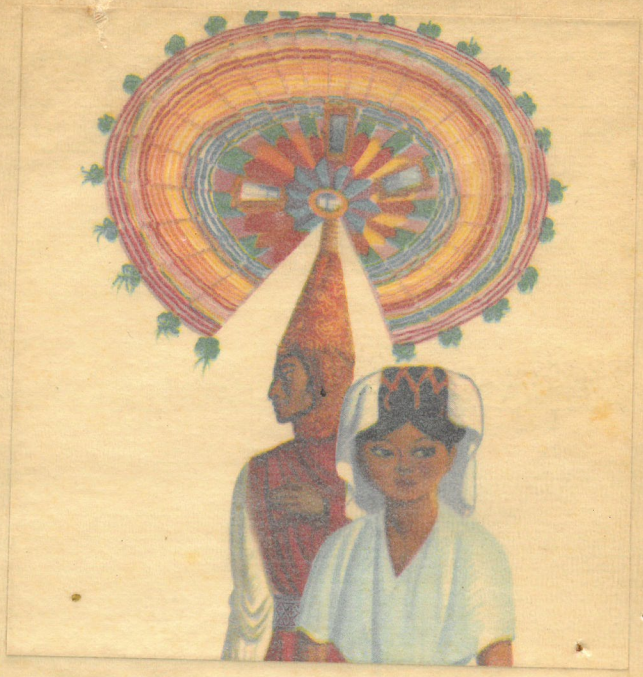

RAMON VALDIOSERA

12-MEXICAN NATIVE COSTUMES

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MEXICAN NATIVE COSTUMES

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RAMON VALDIOSERA

MEXICAN NATIVE COSTUMES

Introduction and text by:
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INDEX

1	Huaxteca	San Luis Potosí
2	Huichol	Nayarit
3	Tarasca	Michoacán
4	Azteca	Puebla
5	Tarasca	Michoacán
6	Totonaca	Sierra De Puebla
7	Jarocha	Sotavento
8	Mixe	Oaxaca
9	Yalalteca	Oaxaca
10	Chinanteca	Veracruz
11	Tehuana	Tehuantepec
12	Maya	Yucatán

INTRODUCTION

ned man as a biped without feathers; it is a definition that has
e fun of, but it carries some truth. Man is the only naked mam-
ıe is ashamed of being so; modesty forces on him the need of
ıimself. Hence, dress stems from modesty more than from such
preoccupation as protection from the cold. Fashion, that serious
f mankind, had its beginning in original sin and the first piece
g was the fig-leaf of our mother Eve. Garments take the place
s or of hairy covering.

:ticular way of dressing expresses the character of an individual.
e novelist, watched a whole epoch come to life again as he con-
a woman's old-fashioned hat. If the robe does not make the
e monk makes the robe; each social level, each profession or
.tes its own garb. Each age, too, changes in appearance; there
instance, a close resemblance between the embroidered coat of
:ntury gentleman, a French park, the facade of Schonbrunn and
ıonata. All of these images — architecture, music, dress — rise from
invisible source, unexplained and inexplainable, like the seed
ly develops into a tree of many branches. Thus fashion is not
d phenomenon, but a significant part of a large whole. It is
dable; clothing becomes a part of the human body as naturally
rows on a sheep.

on functions in time and space and follows, albeit unconsciously,
ı. Its changes are often as imperceptible as those of the hands
h. Over a brief stretch of time those changes take place so gra-
ıt only those living at the moment are aware of them. We for
looking back at the Egyptians, would say that apparently they
ith monotonous uniformity over several thousand years. Yet our
to distinguish any changes is undoubtedly due to our inexpe-
ves.

imitive communities, attire is dictated by conventions far stric-
hose of civilized peoples. But these dictates stem from instinct
n from art and culture, and are therefore less subject to change.
in a primitive society, is the result of a combination of environ-
nate, animal and vegetable life, and of the particular character
ple. Primitive man develops his own clothing styles in accord-

ance with the environment which surrounds him. The dress of the Indian is striking in its lack of artificiality, its spontaneous sincerity. The Indian adapts his clothing to his needs and his comfort, decorating it with unconscious art, and the result is enough to make the man of the city envious.

The reward of such unpretentious sincerity is the magnificence with which the Indian clothes his proverty. Beauty is not bought. The cheapest and coarsest fabrics are made lovely when they are stamped with attractive designs and worn with dignity on a well-proportioned body. Thus primitive man achieves without conscious effort, that subtle and elusive thing called style. Nature here, is superior to art. The Scriptures have said it: "The lilies of the field — Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these".

Such a privilege is part of the "inheritance of the meek". And meek and humble indeed, are the Indians of Mexico. They are secretly pagan too, as are all peoples who live in mild climates, in close communion with nature.

Among all the native inhabitants of Latin America, few possess a folklore as rich as that of the Mexicans. Many of our Indians live very close tu nature and receive almost freely, the food that more developed peoples must seek at the cost of great effort and weariness. It is therefore not strange that an embroidery as delicate as an arpeggio should flower naturally on the "huipil" (*) of an Indian woman. Along with Mexico's acquired civilization which borrows from the European and Anglo-Saxon cultures, there exists in our land a shy, quiet race. They live in isolated huts and tiny vil ages,and on remote ranches, and are a people who, while exploited and ill-treated by the white race, still jealously preserve their old traditions.

The Mexican Indian hears within himself the voice of his ancestors. It is the call of a civilization which, cut short at its beginning, was never able to realize its own potentialities. Destiny for this race, truncated as its own pyramids, was indeed short-lived. And who shall say whether, in the end, it was for good or ill?

(*) "Huipil" is the upper garment of most of Mexico's Indian women. The nearest translation in English, is **blouse.** The "huipil" is usually closed front and back, with an opening for the head. It is generally ample, cut to conceal rather than reveal. Sometimes it is a square, worn cornerwise, other times it is gathered at the neck. Its extension out from the shoulders, form the sleeves.

sera, the painter who offers us these beautiful color-pictures, ent them. They are as authentic as photographs, possibly even Each one of them represents some incident in his life: a trip ion to remote places, a stay among the inhabitants of some e lost in the mountains or nestled at the foot of wooded hills. g painter, this missionary of the brush, was never content with erving the artistic beauty of his subjects; he listened with sym- eir problems and troubles, in long talks by the campfire. The iters of Veracruz, the woodsmen of Quintana Roo and the rs of Chiapas told him their tragedy, a tragedy similar to that c-harvesters in "Vorágine", a novel in which the main char- e terrible jungle — lush, fruitful, devouring.

paintings, Valdiosera expresses implicitly the idea of the abso- ation of Nature over man when he draws the human figure lst of his natural surroundings, in an environment which at ins and determines his attire.

ivilization is an enemy of the picturesque, and tends to dress ormly. Some day, possibly not far off, the highway and the all erase the last vestige of folklore throughout the world. cities shall cover the face of the earth. The plane, the rail- automobile shall reach into the wilds where the Indian lives e did centuries age, not attempting to synchronize the quiet his life with the noisy restlessness of the white man. But "ci- is reaching him; Dr. Atl has lamented that once, on a Oaxaca nstead of the usual geometrical decoration of the Indian pot- , he had seen with horror this herecy: Mutt and Jeff! It would therefore, before our Indian women dress in cheap New York- els, to record these beautiful costumes whose charm is far-re- m all factory-standardization. These drawings possess an in- cumentary value, in time they will serve as accurate historical

relates in "Cousin Pons" that somebody asked an actor fa- his ingenuity, where he ordered the hats that so amused his do not have them made", he replied, "I preserve them". In ite removed from any humorous connotation, these paintings ve, as time passes, the color of something lost and gone. For r, they are a valuable source of ideas and suggestions.

In these modern times, woman, in her attire, enjoys greater freedom than man. Masculine fashions are practical but unbecoming. Women's clothes, insofar as they can escape the servility of mass production, are far less conventional. They can revert to the exotic and the old, make use of the Hundu "sari" or the Mexican "rebozo", copy from the fashion-books of generations past and still be up-to-date! There is no element that cannot incorporate itself and be assimilated by fashion. Valdiosera's color-plates open new horizons to designers.

There is no reason why Mexico should not become a permanent fount of inspiration in the art of dress. To this end, Valdiosera with his rest-less talent, and other contemporary artists, are contributing much.

Description Of Color Plates

:CA SAN LUIS POTOSI

of tropical colors, warm against the blue background of a bril- From the "chaca" tree hangs a huge orchid. The "malango" ›ad as parasols, shield swarms of minute insect-life. The woman ive-cornered "huipil", decorated with a fantastic embroidered as those in the polichrome chandeliers of Puebla. The embroi- :ifs indicate the woman's social position in the community. On ıngs a "morral" or satchel ornamented with a geometric flower- 'he delicate color-tones of the embroideries seem to have been m the water, the flowers, the birds. In the background, a man g coffee in a mortar while two others are transporting sacks of atic bean in a canoe. Straw-roofed huts, with whitewashed ls, are scattered over the hill-slopes. Here is one built under of the palm-trees; in front, o cow-hide chair invites one to a r just to sit and enjoy the evening breeze. We find ourselves ıtskirts of the State of San Luis Potosí.

ɜ is a belief among the natives that the "chaca" tree gives leprosy. dly, this strange legend is due to the fact that, when the trunk aca" tree dries, it looses its healthy dark-reddish color and turns ike and shiny, like the skin of a leper.

Indian woman", says Valdiosera, "clothes herself with a piece pe". It is not to given to everyone, however, to capture scenery ert it into a garment.

woman's broad, bare feet, accustomed to long journeys, hold the earth, as if better to receive its power. Note the similarity igns on the edges of the blouse and skirt, like the final rhymes ses. Over the shoulder runs a transverse motif. Twisted strands ı rich colors, are woven in her braids. The hairdress, or "pe- pre-Columbian origin.

L NAYARIT

:hol Indian from Huicolita is, it is clear to see, an important his community. Judging by his cape, which is a sign of author- a chief or judge. His hand rests on a drum or "teponaxtli",

decorated with garlands of purple flowers and with a cross which is probably the Indian sign of the four winds rather than the Christian symbol. This same motif adorns his "morral" and "faja" (belt) from which hang smaller bags containing deers' eyes and sea-pebbles to ward off evil. The "nahui ollin" motif appears repeatedly on the bags. This chief keeps in his mind the memory of strange rites, passed down sercretly, from generation to generation. With the additional lucrative position of local witch-doctor, the chief manages to keep his granary more than well-filled! He wears a flat-topped straw hat, trimmed with tassels, and a cape whose designs display a complicated symmetry.

Seated behind the chief on a reed mat is a woman, dressed in a high-necked tunic. With two branches in the shape of a cross, she is knitting charms to drive away the "evil eye". The child by her side, is wearing one of these charms, a pagan scapulary. In the background, a young woman carrying gourds, fetches water with Bible-like simplicity. Water must be scarce; the trees raise their bare branches toward heaven imploring a few drops of rain to quench their thirst.

TARASCA MICHOACAN

The attire of this Indian woman is sober by choice; severe, without extravagance or waste of colors. The shawl is black, with vertical blue stripes. Her skirt is also black, edged with a multicolored fringe against a white background. The ensemble is harmonious, full of style and dignity. This is a woman accustomed to live within the rigid standards of her tribe, submitting to the jealous vigilance of the male.

The nets of the fishermen of Lake Pátzcuaro are drying on some posts; they are light and transparent like horsefly wings. The greyish hills are flecked with palegreen. In the distance, under a pleasant blue sky, is the lake.

INDIGENA AZTECA SIERRA DE PUEBLA

According to my tastes, the dress of this figure is at once the most beautiful and the strangest in the collection. To better display the costume, all scenery has been omitted but one can imagine the surroundings. This woman, so completely wrapped up, lives in the cold climate of the high

, where frost and snow abound. The "huipil" is called here the nete" or "tapum" and its splendor is due entirely to the rich, ed embroidery done on a black background: stylized birds, ifs, horses, frets. The woman sits on the floor like an Arab or

hair-dress of the girl is a strange affair, something like a net hing like a crown. Her skirt is handworked in cross-stitch in l fretted design while her wide and graceful shawl is richly ed with birds, animals and flowers. The cloth is black wool, warm for the cold of the high mountain climate.

A MICHOACAN

of this young Tarascan woman would be as severe as a nun's were not for the bougambillia color of the "huipil" which, in e, is called "uanemkua". The skirt ("tziritacum") is a sober brown, like the robe of a Carmelite, but it is brightened at with three red ribbons. It is held in place by a roll or bustle turn, holds up the waistband or "jongaricua". The "rebozo", embles the veil of a novice, is tied at the waist in a original

barefooted young woman pictured, is doubtless a shepherdess. lives on a cattle-ranch is indicated by the fences enclosing the lon't know why this figure reminds me of the mystic maid that Valle Inclán painted in his "Flower of Holiness". Like Agatha this shepherdess spins as she guards her sheep, all the while e ballads that wandering pilgrims or devout blind men have .

CA SIERRA DE PUEBLA

'Totonacs", vanilla-growers of the Gulf Region, are great dan- r typical dances are the "Quetzalines" in which the performer eat feather headgear called a "guagua". In the villages, one also 'Volador" dance whose significance ethnologists are still trying r.

This man wears, on the top a headgear that looks like a paper-cornucopia or an astrologer's cap, an enormous multicolored wheel, undoubtedly a solar symbol. Tassels like butterflies cover its surface. His coat and trousers are of bright red satin, with stripes and fringes of gold and in his hand he carries a kind of rattle, for the ritual dance. He wears "charro" shoes, with elastic sides and high heels.

JAROCHA SOTAVENTO

The dress of this young "jarocha", or girl from the State of Veracruz, has nothing Indian about it; rather, it harks back to Spain, like the gaiety of the "veracruzanos" themselves. Naturally it has been fashioned of a lighter fabric, more suitable to these tropic latitudes, and it has acquired an exotic hue. The pale-pink organdy, falling in wide, cool folds, spells romance. There is a bright kerchief over the girl's shoulders and her velvet apron embroidered with huge tulips presents an harmonious blend of rose and black. The rosebuds and ribbons in her hair are held by a tortoiseshell comb. This "cachirul" as it is called, is smaller than the Spanish comb and is generally set with pearls. Like her sister in Spain, our "jarocha" handles her fan with consummate art and like women the world over, she puts it to uses far removed from the innocent task of cooling the air! A cameo on a ribbon is around her neck.

In the background, with unceasing murmur flows the Papaloapan River along whose banks live the purest-blooded "veracruzanos" in the state. The small river-town of Tlacotalpan. A young girl dances the "bamba" with its African overtones. Palms and coconut-trees fill the landscape. The air is warm and there is fire in the heart.

MIXE OAXACA

The Mixes are neighbors of the Yalaltecas. They wear a turban fashioned of heavy woolen strips, in a blue and bougamvillia-striped pattern. It is characteristic of the Mixe woman to adorn herself with an extravagant profusion of glass-bead necklaces. These necklaces press into her flesh like the tight bands prisoners wear. Her green skirt has alternate brown and cherry-colored stripes. The originality of this costume, within the Indian type of clothing, consists mainly of the fact that the "huipil" — exceptionally brief in this case — is fitted at the waist.

....Back-drop is a mountain landscape on which can be seen scattered huts; in one of them a storekeeper is busy arranging his wares.

LTECA OAXACA

eal Mexico, free from outside influences, is found mainly in the rn part of the country. This mountain girl whose skin is as red earth trod by her two-thanged huaraches, is dressed in a white "hui- ı which is traced a delicate motif of bright-colored leaves and wild- s. The cotton cloth of her dress hangs full and ample.

er head-dress of wool-yarn is as purple-black as her hair; she wears er woven in her braids or wound like a turban around her head. irt, well-named "enredo" or tangle, (in *her* dialect it is "stapa" or hil") has narrow, brown stripes. The Yalalteca woman is an expert mble spinner.

he woman's skirt is fastened by a sash stiffened with a lining of palm-leaves. This is her gala dress; her daily garb is simpler.

ır away, hidden in the luxuriant vegetation, is seen the village . On the mountain's top the clouds are massed like white fleece; mountain's foot are the tile and straw roofs of the village. The huts have green-painted walls.

ı CHINANTECA VERACRUZ

ɔu can feel the heaviness of the stiff "huipil" that hides this woman's The color is striking; it is the typical Indian red, obtained from retion of the "cochinilla" bug. In the fretted design there is an ıting, snake-line. Under the "huipil" is a striped skirt, plain on per part. The turban is interesting: to form it, two half-yard pie- cloth are used; they are adorned with embroidered flowers and held r by a knot. The skirt and "huipil" are woven on hand-made fashioned of a bamboo-reed called "otate".

so made of "otate" is the raft on which an Indian drifts down- to sell his produce in neighboring towns like Tuxtepec. But he cept payment only in silver coins, he does not trust the paper- that fire can convert to ashes. And he dreads even more the river eriodically overflows, flooding the village, ruining the crops and the region with mourning, misery and hunger. These villagers ced to move frequently. They take to the hill-tops but the fas- n of the river is so strong that, after a period of calm, they go

back to its fertile banks, until a new catastrophe occurs. The hostility of the elements in much of our land explains, without a doubt, the bloody religion of the aborigines.

TEHUANA TEHUANTEPEC

Possibly in the whole of Mexican folklore, there is no costume of more vigorous personality than that of the Tehuana. It stands out over those of her sisters. The head-gear is like a huge wing; coming out of church, a group of Tehuanas resemble a flight of doves. Each girl, her arm raised in a lovely flowing line, holds on her head a yellow tray decorated with blue flowers and filled with tropical fruits. She wears a black "huipil" embroidered with full-blown flowers and bright-green leaves. When she enters the church she covers her head with the fine lace of her head-gear, which thus serves her as a "mantilla". Once outside the church, she throws it back over her forehead like a halo. Her long costume falls to her feet and its abundant lace ruffle sweeps the floor.

The Tehuana's enthusiastic desire for gold coins is proverbial. Often the pieces are very old, handed down from generation to generation, and strung in necklaces or bracelets. The Tehuana fatithfully observes the traditions of her people. Sometimes the traveler is surprised to find one with white skin and green eyes, characteristics evidently from outside the region!

The gay "zandunga" sets the blood pounding at the village fiestas; it is a dance of burning sun and warm, starry nights, typical of the Isthmus. In the background is glimpsed a neat, tiled-roof cottage.

MAYA YUCATAN

This Maya Indian shows the characteristic features of her people, at once the most mysterious, the gentlest and most cultured of all the races that inhabited pre-Columbian Mexico: high cheekbones, narrow, receding forehead, almond-shaped eyes. Their ancient sculptors did not lie or exaggerate when they molded in their idols features that can be observed even now.

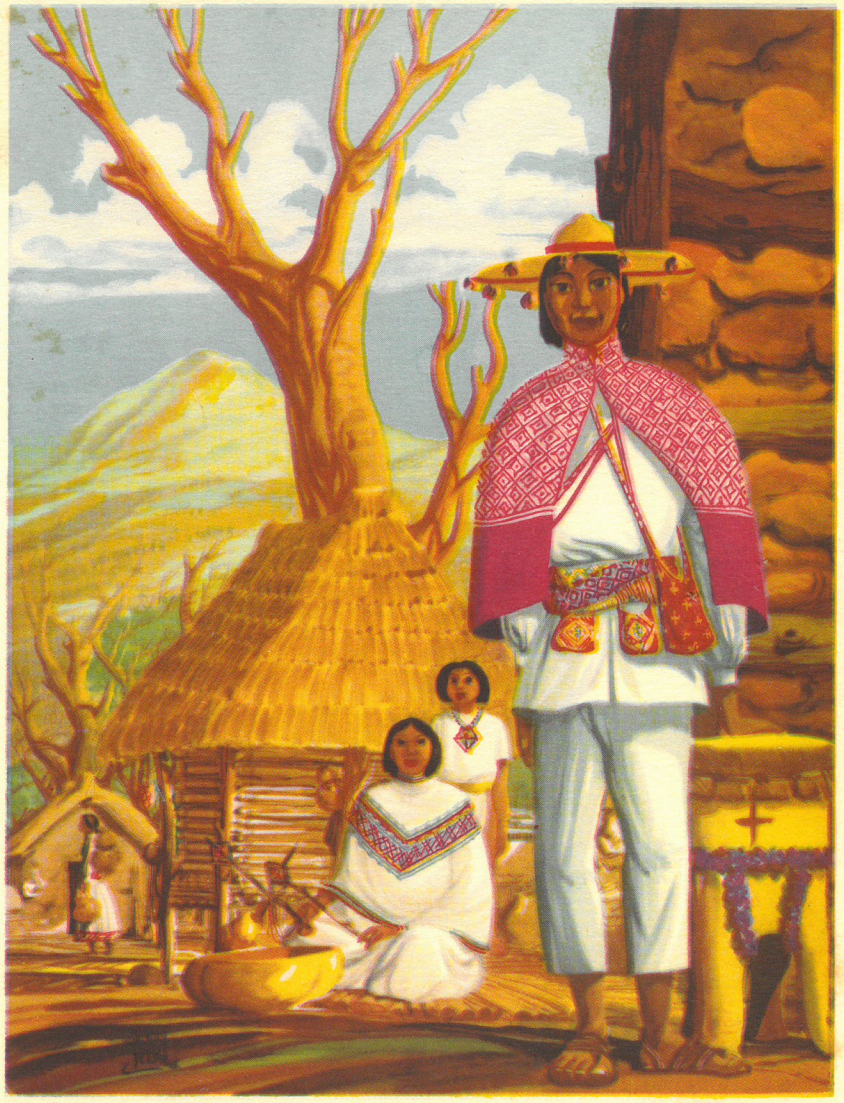
The woman wears a white organdy "huipil" which conceals the lines of her figure. A wide bow of red ribbon contrasts with her black hair, shining and smooth as lacquer. The neck is square and embroidered

with a cross-stitched fret. The flower is from the "tabachín" (jacaranda), a tree with blossoms so bright that the French rightly call it "flamboyant" – forged in the sun's fire. A wide lace ruffle edges the skirt which stops just above the ankle. One arm holds a sand-colored clay jug whose only trim is a single white circular line. The other arm rests on some ochre-toned rocks. Her indigo-blue shawl crosses to form an X over her breast. She wears earrings and a gold-filigree necklace, with a cross. The flowers of her "huipil" are repeated on her shoes.

All about is the arid and sun-dried soil of Yucatán, the deserted, lime-whitened landscape. In the distance is a pyramid, symbol of ancient rites and sacrifices. At its foot grows a row of maguey plants.

Another tree blooms in the dryness of the desert. Valdiosera painted it there, undoubtedly from a sense of gratitude. It is called the "ox" by the Yucatecans and is famous for offering cool shade and for attracting rain. Its foliage extends out like a parasol and reminds one of the pines in the Roman landscape. The "ox" serves, too, as feed which is why the Spaniards gave it the name of "Ramon". That is what the shepherds of Castille called the brushwood they gave as pasture to their cattle when droughts dried the land or snow covered the field.

1 - Huasteca San Luis Potosi



3 - Tarasca Michoacan

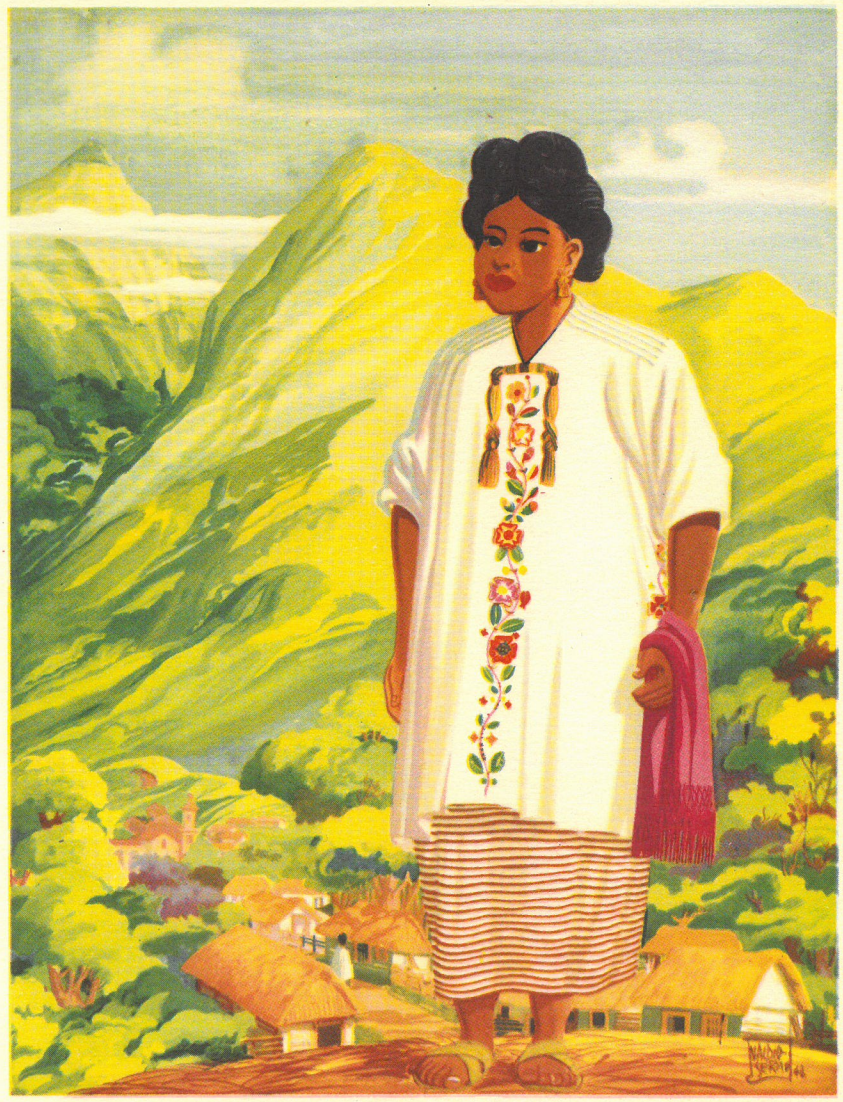
4 - Azteca Puebla

6 - Totonaca Sierra de Puebla

7 - Tarocha Sotavento

5 - Azteca Jalisco

8 - Mixe Oaxaca



9 - Yalalteca Oaxaca

10 - Chinanteca Veracruz

11 - Tehuana Tehuantepec

12 - Maya Yucatan